

**TOWN/VILLAGE OF NORTHFIELD  
JOINT PUBLIC HEARING  
BOARD OF TOWN SELECTMEN  
BOARD OF VILLAGE TRUSTEES  
Minutes of January 2, 2013**

Beginning at 6:00 p.m., the Northfield Boards of Town Selectmen and Village Trustees held a warned Joint Public Hearing for the purpose of obtaining written or oral views on the proposed plan for Town and Village merger to be voted upon at the next annual Town Meeting (March 5, 2013). Those present included Trustees Chair Kevin T. Beal, Trustees Colin T. Bright, Dennis Donahue, Stephen Fitzhugh, and K. David Maxwell; Selectmen Brad Denny, Charles Morse, John Quinn III, and Gregory Sanders; Town Manager Robert Lewis and Village Manager Jay Marcotte; Merger Committee members Mel Adams, Carolyn Stevens, Donald Wallace, Christopher Curtis, and Kathleen Lott; Nanci Allard, Anne Donahue (Vermont State Legislature); Leslie Mathews (Conservation Commission); John Stevens; Austin Gray; Mary Dollenmaier (Planning Commission); Fred Nadon; and Richard Hyde.

Trustee Chair Beal began the Public Hearing by describing the Town/Village Merger process to this point. Chair Beal noted that some of the Village Trustees retain concerns regarding the transfer of Village assets to the Town while the indebtedness remains with the utility customers. It was noted that these issues have been researched by attorney Paul Giuliani and VLCT Executive Director Steven Jeffrey; both endorsed the current wording. Donald Wallace believes that this is a moot point as public utility companies rarely (if ever) go bankrupt. Chair Beal later stated that the Village Trustees will be seeking another legal opinion on this matter.

Nanci Allard expressed her concern that while the financial condition of Northfield Village is in good condition, the Town's finances are not. She is concerned that the post-merger Select Board would not be able to properly track the expenses associated with operating and maintaining the utility departments, including those involving enterprise funds. Trustee Bright stated that the Boards have been making a better effort of tracking inter-departmental costs over the past couple years. He added that the Merger Plan is vague in some areas in order to keep the document brief. Chair Beal noted that these operational concerns would be resolved during the year-long transitional period before full merger would come into effect (07/01/14). Town Manager Lewis added that he met earlier today with Village Manager Marcotte on creating a draft combined Town and Village budget in order to determine the financial impact of merger on Northfield. In addition, all municipal assets now are being tallied and categorized.

Selectman Morse then commended the Merger Committee for an excellent job performed in a relatively short amount of time. He added that although Vermonters normally are resistant to change, he believes that should merger pass, the end result would be beneficial to the community with a higher level of municipal efficiency. Selectman Denny agreed that having two elected boards in a community this size is not effective.

State Representative Anne Donahue stated that the legislative committee tasked with reviewing merger documents has very experienced members and that it performs a very thorough analysis before the document is forwarded for full legislative approval.

Merger Committee member Chris Curtis emphasized that the committee looked at other Vermont communities that went through a similar merger process, such as Randolph, in drafting the current Merger Plan. Many of these communities also had public utility companies and the concerns expressed tonight were resolved by these other merged communities. He added that these issues can be resolved during the aforementioned year-long transitional period.

Trustee Fitzhugh would like the new utility commissions to have more autonomy from the merged Select Board given the additional responsibilities, i.e. Village roads, sidewalks, etc. that would be provided to that board.

Austin Gray then spoke strongly support of merger, stating that it would eliminate the dysfunction seen in recent years when the two elected boards did not effectively work together. He also feels that a community this size does not need two separate municipalities and that even if there are some bumps in the road, merger would have long-term benefits for Northfield.

Mr. Adams then discussed the reasons behind the year-long transitional period as well as what can and should be accomplished during this period. In addition, the first eight months post-merger would see an expanded (nine member) Select Board; the board then would contract back to five members after the March 2015 Town Meeting.

It was noted that the next Public Hearing on this matter would be held on Monday, January 21, 2013 at 6:00 p.m. in the Community Room located in the Brown Public Library (93 South Main Street).

As there were no other questions or comments, there was a motion from Selectman Morse, seconded by Trustee Maxwell, to close the Public Hearing.

**Motion passed 9-0-0.**

The Public Hearing adjourned at 6:57 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

*Robert H. Lewis*

Robert H. Lewis, Acting Clerk

These minutes were approved by the Town Selectmen and Village Trustees at their meetings of January 14, 2013 and January 15, 2013 respectively.